



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC CHAIRMAN MICHAEL POWELL PROMOTES RURAL TELEMEDICINE TECHNOLOGY AT UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA DEMONSTRATION

Charlottesville, VA – Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Michael Powell today visited the University of Virginia's Office of Telemedicine to showcase the latest telemedicine technology and to see first-hand how rural residents can have remote access to urban hospital facilities and services.

Chairman Powell's visit also highlights the FCC's program that promotes access to modern telecommunications and information services for medical and health maintenance purposes. The six-year-old FCC program provides discounted telecommunications services to rural health care providers at rates equal to the rates charged for similar services in urban areas.

Powell said, "It is vitally important to strengthen our nation's telemedicine and telehealth networks. I am pushing for greater participation in the FCC's universal service support program so that the quality of health care services available to Americans is not dependent upon their geographic location. With telemedicine technologies, geographical isolation will no longer be an insurmountable obstacle to the basic needs of timely and quality medical care."

The FCC is scheduled to broaden the benefits of the rural health care program later this month. At its November Agenda Meeting November 13, 2003, the FCC will consider proposals to update the program's rules to better reflect the changing marketplace and telemedicine technologies and to take into account the unique circumstances of rural communities. Although the program, a part of the FCC's Universal Service Fund (USF), is capped at \$400 million annually, demand for Funding Year 2001 averaged \$14 million, or only 3.5% of the possible discounts.

"The rural health care program promotes the development of a broader and more fully integrated network of health care providers. In the aftermath of recent national events, the importance of such a network to national security and public safety is significant," Mr. Powell also noted.

At the UVA telemedicine center, Chairman Powell participated in various telemedicine demonstrations. In one case, he observed a telemedicine conference between UVA and a mother located in rural Saltville, Virginia, whose daughter suffered from a facial tumor, but because of telemedicine technologies had access to a world renowned pediatric plastic surgeon. In another case, a registered nurse in rural Bath County Community Hospital was connected to UVA and she discussed a transmission of a cardiac ultrasound and a radiographic image.

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